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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4452
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0820
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9596
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4114
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1574
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3291
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6691
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4305
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0703
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0704
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0347
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2637
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0279
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000521

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, PRM; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: KAREN-BURMESE CLASHES CREATE REFUGEES AND IDP'S

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 65

[1](#)B. 05 RANGOON 908

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Classified By: Vice Consul Walter Parrs III for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Over the last few weeks, Burmese Army units struck at over a dozen villages and roadside locations around the town of Bawgalagyi in northern Karen State in a new push to wrest control of the Karen hold there. According to an Embassy contact, this has resulted in a new wave of IDPs and over 1,000 new refugees pouring into Thailand. KNU forces, which typically rely on guerrilla tactics, have not come into direct conflict with the GOB forces, but recent KNU ambushes resulting in GOB casualties may be prompting military reprisals. Local Karen villagers bear the brunt of the recent spate of violence, with new stories surfacing of forced conscription, portering, relocation, and executions. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On April 24, Emboffs met with Saw Simon Tha, Chairman of the Karen Development Council and delegate to the National Convention, to discuss recent reports of military clashes in northern Karen State. Simon Tha, who traveled through the affected areas two weeks ago, described the current violence as a regime-instigated flare-up not uncommon in northern Karen State. Clashes between Burmese Army and KNU units over the past six to eight weeks are situated on the home turf of the KNU's 2nd Brigade, a seasoned band of soldiers led by a hard-liner who continues to resist GOB pressure. While southern KNU forces near the Thai border town of Mae Sot have remained quiet for the past few years, KNU units in the north have continued to clash regularly with the Burmese Army.

[1](#)3. (C) Local Karen villagers, as is too common, suffer most from the current military engagements. Simon Tha said that over 1,000 refugees have fled to Thailand in the last few weeks. In northern Karen State, GOB forces are relocating an

unknown number of villages to areas where they can be better monitored. The GOB has forced ten villages to provide conscripted labor to "clean and maintain" the two principal roads that traverse that area of the state. According to Simon Tha, soldiers force these villagers to march (ahead of prisoners) through disputed areas to deter the KNU from planting land mines.

¶4. (C) Keeping the road that runs from Taungoo through Bawgalagyi to Kayah State and Thailand under firm GOB control appears to be the focus of the current military intervention.

Simon Tha said that most of the GOB's assaults have been mortar attacks fired from this road on neighboring villages. He reported stories he heard there of GOB forces executing young Karen men and Pa-O villagers from neighboring Kayah State who had wandered too far in search of firewood.

¶5. (C) According to Embassy sources, the GOB may use military action to avenge KNU assaults on GOB forces. Within recent months, northern KNU forces sprung two separate ambushes, resulting in Burmese Army casualties. KNU troops had issued warnings to GOB forces not to enter certain areas.

GOB forces tried to call their bluff, but marched in to find themselves surrounded and attacked by guerrilla bands.

¶6. (C) Karen State closely parallels the only road from Rangoon to the new administrative capital of Pyinmana. Disabling that road would interrupt vital transportation between Rangoon and the new capital. Old Karen have told us that the new capital has been built in traditional Karen territory. The current military offensive in northern Karen State may also represent GOB efforts to secure this direct transportation link.

¶7. (C) Comment: Embassy sources back up reports from

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Thailand about a new wave of refugee movement by the Karen. However, Embassy sources are not willing to call the GOB action a major military offensive as some outside Burma have done. Instead, this may be yet another round of the ongoing conflict in northern Karen. Given the long history of struggle between the Karen and the Burmese military, we are certain that the military will stop at nothing to secure the new capital. If distrusted ethnic minorities are in the region, they will be removed. End Comment.
VILLAROSA